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[Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader, Boundaries start with the word No...](#)



Dear *Permission to be Powerful* Reader,

Boundaries start with the word No.

In other words, if you can't say the word No...

You have no boundaries.

That was me for most of my life, yet I didn't recognize it. If you can't say No, you're at everyone else's mercy. If you can't say No, the people around you will use and exploit you. This is a huge problem — not being able to say No. But this was how I lived for my whole life.

It was exhausting, and I felt incredibly guilty for saying No.

Some people, like me, have issues saying "No," and others have problems hearing "know."

Some people become enraged when they hear the word No. This is not an appropriate or healthy response, but that's the beauty of humanity — we come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and flavors. And some people believe some crazy shit. Some people make it scarily far in life without hearing the word No.

This is how you turn a child into a monster by refusing to enforce limits on them. As stated before, boundaries are not about words. I used to think that complaining about how people treated me was the same as boundaries. Very wrong. Nobody has the right to take your boundaries away from you. Anyone who makes you think that they do is probably very unhealthy, if not mentally ill.

But millions of people live this way. They feel entitled to do whatever they want. This could be for any number of reasons: narcissism or some other type of character defect.

I struggled with that word so much. At 19, I worked in a kitchen. When it came time for me to quit, I was so afraid to tell my boss that I stopped showing up until they got the message. For whatever reason, I have some trauma around speaking up. In moments when I must put up a boundary, I recoil and start fawning instead.

The words escape me, and with that, I slowly watch my agency dwindling in real-time. Why?

Why is saying No so hard for some people?

Well... some people are conflict-averse.

Others lust for conflict.

Some people over-empathize with other people's feelings.

Some people grew up in environments where they were trained to focus on everybody BUT themselves.

Some people have some strange ideas about whether or not boundaries deserve respect.

Some people have trouble speaking up for themselves in the presence of an authority figure. The problem could be situational. You may do all the work whenever you get into a group project while everyone else slacks off.

Maybe that's been happening to you repeatedly for your whole life. There are many reasons why people do not enforce boundaries. But if you struggle with this problem, you will invite exploitation and stress into your life. I let people take advantage of me for so long that I finally said no, "Enough is enough," after I was so exhausted that there was nothing left to give.

One of the reasons some people struggle to say No is because they don't even know what their rights are. If you grew up in a strict or oppressive household, you may even doubt that you have any rights at all. So, before I even talk about saying know, I'd like to preface this lesson with some perspective that may help people get more comfortable saying the word No. First of all... you have the right to decide to do ANYTHING.

You have the right to think about anything.

You have the right to change your mind. So many people have trouble with this one. You agree to help your friend out, but on the day, you're tired, sick, the weather's awful — whatever the case may be — and you don't want to help them anymore. But you already agreed. Now you feel trapped. Guess what: you can change your mind anytime, no matter what anyone tells you.

When I got into this concept, I reviewed the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These are rights that every human has, no matter who they are or where they're born. Worth reviewing. The next time somebody tries to infringe on your rights, you'll be clear on what you deserve regardless of what the other person thinks about it.

You also have the right not to know. Manipulative people love to suggest that you should "know better." It's a great way to convince you to give up

your right to live as you see fit. But you don't have to know better. If anyone asks you what the "right" way to do something "should" be ... "I don't know." It is a perfectly valid response.

When you start enforcing boundaries, your life becomes calmer and more peaceful. While there may be some upheaval and conflict when you begin enforcing boundaries with others, your life becomes more peaceful once you successfully implement your boundaries.

If you don't feel comfortable saying "no," your next best bet is to say...

"Let me think about it."

That phrase changed my life. Any time I was on the spot... I wanted to say "No," but I felt conflicted... "I'll think about it." It gave me the time and space I needed to collect myself. I still use this phrase today.

Here's an essential concept for firm boundaries: Be clear on what you want, stick to your guns, and don't justify your position. Just state your desired outcome over and over again like a broken record. This is a good practice when you are learning to be a stronger person... but it's not the be-all and end-all.

I treat people who respect my boundaries one way and people who don't another way. People who don't respect my boundaries are not necessarily entitled to my respect. If you are willfully crossing my boundaries, you get the apex predator side of me. That side. The side I now call Mike Tyson knows how to care for himself very well. He can be cold and ruthless when he needs to be.

That side of me is FIERCELY on my side. Mike Tyson will fight to the death to protect his inner child. When it comes to that little boy, EVERYTHING is personal. You fuck with him... and all bets are off. My go-to boundary is silence. When I give you the Mike Tyson side. More specifically, it's disconnection. If you disrespect me, I may not look you in the eye. I don't know why.

And I don't remember where I came up with this idea, but it's been very effective. I almost look through the person. When you don't allow someone to meet your gaze, you tell them, "You can't reach me. You can't touch me." It's very unsettling. Once I make eye contact with someone, I start to build a layer of empathy towards them. People notice when that layer is missing.

We are so heavily groomed and socialized to behave in one way that it becomes pretty jarring when we contradict social conventions. This could happen during an argument, an altercation, a minor disagreement with a stranger, or someone we previously thought was a friend.

Several people in my dance community with whom I am not friends. I see them, walk straight past them, and never acknowledge them. They're invisible. They don't exist. You can't give away your power to someone if you refuse to engage with them. My father taught me, among other things, to tolerate disrespect constantly. He had this way of being a monster, then turning around and being sweet after the fact—a formula for Stockholm syndrome. You confuse love with hate and link the two in your mind.

Now, when I see someone who presents me with this love/hate dynamic, I have to be careful not to get attracted to them. It's important to enforce boundaries because dysfunctional dynamics perpetuate themselves across generations. In other words, if you don't end a toxic cycle once and for all, you pass it down to your children. No, if, ands, or buts.

Boundaries Aren't About Controlling People

It's about controlling yourself and your response. If they do this, you do that. You pull back. You become unresponsive. I went five years without speaking to my entire family. Now, a bunch of people who never respected me very much fear me and my wrath. Silence can be deafening. Sometimes, you can say everything you need without saying a word.

Don't try to change people or convince them of anything. Just let them know what you will or won't accept. Be very clear. And, if someone crosses

the line, you must make good on your proverbial threats. Sometimes, solving conflict requires a mediator, like a therapist or a couples counselor.

I'm a big believer in getting a trusted third party to mediate. This can help you straighten out a very sticky situation. Some people don't like being held accountable, others are unreasonable, and others won't hear or see you. In such situations, a third person can be ideal for bridging the gap and facilitating good, fair communication.

Until next time,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anton Volney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Anton" on the left and "Volney" on the right, separated by a vertical stroke. There are several intersecting and overlapping lines that form the strokes of the signature, giving it a dynamic and layered appearance.

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist



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